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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to examine teachers' expectations regarding the reading achievement of children from divorced and intact families. Sixty elementary school teachers participated by completing a survey. Four variations for the survey were distributed. Each version differed from the others only to the extent that the introductory statement was modified to change the sex of the hypothetical child and the marital status of the hypothetical child's mother. The teachers numerically rated their hypothetical child on seven academic characteristics and four questions that required personal opinions. Results indicated that teachers' performance expectations were lower for children from divorced families. Furthermore, lower expectations were held for boys than girls regardless of their family dynamics. (Contains 47 references and 2 tables of data. The four versions of the survey instrument are attached.) (Author/RS)

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Teachers' Perceptions Regarding the Effects of Marital Disruption on Children's Reading Performance and Attitudes

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For the Master of Arts Degree in
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Abstract

This study was conducted to examine teachers' expectations regarding the reading achievement of children from divorced and intact families. Sixty elementary school teachers participated by completing a survey. Four variations of the survey were distributed. Each version differed from the others only to the extent that the introductory statement was modified to change the sex of the hypothetical child and the marital status of the hypothetical child's mother. The teachers numerically rated their hypothetical child on seven academic characteristics and four questions that required personal opinions. Results indicated that teachers' performance expectations were lower for children from divorced families. Furthermore, lower expectations were held for boys than girls regardless of their family dynamics.

Teachers' Perceptions Regarding the Effects of Marital Disruption on Children's Reading Performance and Attitudes

Divorce has affected more than one million children a year since 1980 (Strom, 1983). In 1980, approximately half of all children lived a substantial amount of time with only one parent before they reached the age of eighteen, due primarily to separation or divorce (Brown, 1980). According to Strom (1983) children in American classrooms may be at risk emotionally and academically because of these statistics. Teachers are challenged with becoming more aware of divorces' effects on children "and of finding ways to meet their special needs" (p. 4).

Hammond (1979) found discrepancies in the research concerning parental separation and its effect on children. Numerous findings showed a negative impact on children's academic abilities, while a small number of other studies showed children's abilities did not change. She conducted a study of 165 children from lower-middle to middle-class suburban communities. Half of the children were from divorced families. Classroom teachers were asked to provide information on the participating students' achievement in reading by recording his or her position on a nine-point scale. The data indicated that there were no significant differences in reading achievement between children of divorced and intact families.

Similarly, Doering and Goetting (1980) found that there are, in fact, positive aspects of divorce on children. After age five, no destructive characteristics could be connected to the one-parent family and furthermore, it was found to be more beneficial for a child to grow up happy in a single-parent home, than unhappy in a conflict-ridden two-parent

home. Doering and Goetting (1980) concluded that children of divorced parents showed little, if any, deficiencies in academic achievement.

Nisivoccia (1997) pointed out that parental separation and divorce can have a critical negative effect on students' academic performance and hinder their ability to reach their full potential for school success.

Kinard and Reinherz (1986) explained that various characteristics, such as gender, age, birth order of the child, family socioeconomic status, maternal employment, and length of time since marital disruption are correlated with detrimental effects marital disruption has on children's academic achievement and performance.

Shinn (1978) found that father absence on children's cognitive development causes detrimental effects. "Father absence during the preschool years may be more detrimental than later absence" (p. 312). Higher scores on achievement measures were consistently found to correlate with highly available fathers as compared to those fathers who were less available.

Shinn (1978) also found that low socioeconomic levels of most fatherless homes or less amounts of parental attention contributed to a general cognitive deficit. Shinn's (1978) other hypothesis suggested that poor cognitive performance may not be caused by father absence, but rather by the financial hardship, extreme anxiety, and most importantly, low levels of child-parent interaction that are experienced when one parent leaves the home. Low levels of interaction may occur if single-mothers are consumed in coping with economic disadvantages, therefore working long hours and most days of the week, which result in depleted mental energies when they are with their children. Single-mothers who are at a financial advantage may spend additional time with their children. If these mothers are engaged with their children, they are likely to promote verbal

development. Shinn (1978) concluded that children's parental interactions advances cognitive development and abatement in interaction holds it back.

A study by Svanum, Bringle, and McLaughlin (1982) found no significant negative effects associated with father absence when socioeconomic status was controlled for both black and white children. However, an exact interpretation of this finding was not possible because the role that socioeconomic status assumes in the underlying process of father absence and cognitive development was unclear. When the data for socioeconomic status was unadjusted, father-absent children performed more poorly on cognitive measures, especially on WRAT reading scores. When socioeconomic status was controlled, a small but significant increase on WISC vocabulary was attained for white children. Black males also demonstrated a corresponding pattern of performance on WISC vocabulary. Svanum et al. suggested that males displayed greater verbal abilities, which reflected the more central role the mother played in the child development of father-absent homes.

Bisnaire, Firestone, and Rynard (1990) collected data from seventy-seven children and their divorced or separated parent. The measures were comprised of The Parent Information Questionnaire, The Home Environment Questionnaire, The Children's Separation Inventory, The Single Parenting Questionnaire, The Health Resources Inventory, and The School Record Questionnaire. The overall results established that children who experienced continual contact with both parents after the separation sustained academic performance, indicating that both parents add to the academic input of a child's learning. An additional finding was that the less time the mother spent at work, the better the child's competency at school. In contrast, the higher the father's income, the lower the child's competency. A significant decrease in the children's

academic performance was evident in thirty percent of the subjects following parental separation. This continued to be evident three years later. There were "significant correlations indicating that mothers with more education provided better psychosocial home environments and that their children spent more time with the noncustodial parent" (p. 75). Another important conclusion Bisnaire et al. discovered was that the more time fathers spent at work, the less time was spent with their children. The more time a child spends with the noncustodial parent the better the overall adjustment of the child.

Guidubaldi and Perry (1984) conducted a study in which the focus was to investigate "the predictive significance of divorced versus intact family status of kindergarten children, and to assess the amount of predicted variance that is independent of a composite socioeconomic factor" (p. 460). Results demonstrated that socioeconomic indicators of fathers' occupation and mothers' educational level consistently predicted school-entry competencies. The most prominent predictor variable, single-parent status, surpassed the independent correlations of three socioeconomic measures. The most profound relationship between single-parent status and criteria were noticed for WRAT Reading. Guidubaldi and Perry (1984) determined that children from divorced families begin school with considerable less academic and social ability than those from intact families and a "critical concern is that the impact of divorce is not static, but rather changes across time and context" (p. 467).

Zajonc (1976) also discussed the impact of father absence on children by explaining that one-parent homes create an inferior intellectual surrounding thus resulting in intellectual deficits. Zajonc (1976) continued to point out that the early loss of a parent produces more severe deficits than a loss happening at a later age and intellectual performance is more negatively affected the longer the father's absence. Interestingly,

Zajonc (1976) stated that "children whose fathers are frequently absent or not readily available because of their occupation, show substantial intellectual and academic lags. Restoration of adult presence has beneficial effects. Remarriage of the remaining parent, especially if it occurs early in the child's life, results in improved intellectual performance" (p. 230-231).

In contrast, Kinard and Reinherz (1986) suggested in their study that the effects of parental divorce diminished over time and the impact of the marital disruption was less severe for preschool-age children than for school-age children. This study involved the effects of marital disruption on the academic achievement of fourth grade children by comparing them to single-mother families who experienced the disruption before they entered school, during their early school years, and children in two-parent families who had never experienced marital disruption. Children from recently disrupted families had the lowest scores on language and achievement in fourth grade and were perceived by third grade teachers as being the least productive. Children who never experienced disruption had the highest scores and were rated the most productive. Another finding of this study that did not support previous research was the lack of differential effects of maternal employment on children's academic functioning even though single mothers were more likely to be employed. Maternal employment had no effects on the outcome measures. Maternal education was an important predictor of children's cognitive functioning as well as language ability, and was related to the measure of verbal reasoning at preschool, teacher ratings of overall achievement at third grade, and to all measures of achievement at fourth grade. "As mothers' education increased, so did their children's school performance" (p. 289). Kinard and Reinherz (1986) indicated that mothers' education had a far greater impact than marital disruption on children's

achievement. When gender and maternal education were controlled, marital disruption had significant effects on language achievement, total achievement, and teacher ratings of productivity. The least amount of problems were seen in families that were never disrupted. The greatest problems were seen in children of recently disrupted families. Boys were consistently rated by teachers as having the most significant problems in productivity and parents viewed girls as possessing a higher overall school achievement than boys, although these gender differences were independent of family type.

Thompson and Smidchens (1979) conducted an in-depth study containing all fifth grade students in a school district. Their objective was to collect and examine data on reading comprehension achievement and various family demographic variables. They examined differences in the achievement levels of students who live with one or both parents, differences between genders within the dichotomy of family organization, racial characteristics that played a role in affecting family organization and student achievement, and if socioeconomic components effects any of these findings. The California Achievement Test was used to collect data regarding student achievement in the fall of the school year. The reading comprehension subtest was used as the dependent variable. Independent variables included race, sex, family organization (one or two parents), and three measures of family socioeconomic status. These measures included parents average educational level, highest occupational standing in the home used only if two parents were employed, and finally the estimated total family income. Of over four hundred students, twenty percent were from single-parent homes and seventeen percent were from a minority group. Mean achievement values were a result of the raw scores obtained on the reading comprehension subtest. Thompson and Smidchens (1979) concluded that children from two-parent families scored higher than those from one-

parent families. Similarly, levels of student achievement increased with the level of parental education. Students whose parents' occupational standing was above the median scored higher than those whose parents ranked below the median. For the below median income level group, lower scores were noticed in the one-parent family on reading comprehension than the two-parent family. White students achieved higher scores than black students. The differences on reading comprehension between two-parent and one-parent families were greater for black students than for white students. Black students from one-parent families had the lowest mean. Finally, the sex of the student did not show a significant effect. Thompson and Smidchens (1979) determined that "students from two-parent families tended to record higher reading comprehension achievement scores than did students from one-parent families" (p. 11). This study generally concluded that "family organization seems to have a greater impact on students in lower ranges of the socioeconomic scales" (p. 11). The obvious reason for this may be that the higher the income, occupational prestige, and education level of the parent, the more apt he or she is to have time, resources, and experiences that are directly related toward student achievement (Thompson and Smidchens, 1979).

Hett (1980) led a Canadian study consisting of twenty-one children from separated families and twenty-one children from intact families, grades two through six. Results revealed that teachers rated ten of the children from separated families as achieving at below grade levels and fourteen of these children as working below their ability level. Five children from intact families were rated as functioning below their grade level and eight children were viewed as working below their ability. On the WRAT achievement scores of the children from separated families, ten of the twenty-one children scored below grade placement on the arithmetic, spelling and reading subtests. Hett (1980)

concluded that this study, supported by studies from the United States, indicated that children from separated and divorced families showed significantly more school-related problems than did children living in intact families.

Colman (1995) gathered data from The Research School of Social Science at the Australian Nation University from 1989 to 1994. This data revealed that children from divorced families get "on average, half a year's less education than children from families that remain intact, given background circumstances, such as parental education and occupations" (p. 8). It was also found that in families where both parents left school at the end of eighth grade, children get 1.5 years less education than children from families where both parents have a university education. Similarly, Colman (1995) reported that children from homes where parents are at the bottom of the occupational ladder also get about 1.5 years less education than those whose parents are at the top of the occupational ladder. The final conclusion revealed that children from families where there were limited availability of books also get less education, regardless of parents' education and occupation.

Carey and Mason (1996) reported that fifty percent of children are from divorced families but only ten percent attend Ivy League schools. Subsequently, data from 27,000 students nationwide was analyzed and it was found that only half of children from divorced or separated families were likely to attend one of the country's top fifty colleges. This statistic was concluded after taking parents' education and income into account. It was explained that divorce tends to lower a student's SAT scores and grade point average. It was also pointed out that divorce does diminish children's emotional energy and attention which makes it more difficult to concentrate on homework or join activities which are reflected on college applications. An additional explanation for this

low percentage of Ivy League enrollment may be because "divorced dads may also be less willing to spring for Ivy League tuitions" (Carey and Mason, 1996, p. 16).

Consistent with these findings, it was established that college students who experienced a prolonged father absence scored significantly lower on the Linguistic and Quantitative portions of the American College Test than students whose fathers were present in the home (Tors, 1995).

Further investigations of the correlation between family organization and the SAT scores found that boys whose fathers were absent displayed lower quantitative scores and higher verbal scores on the SATs (Carlsmith, 1964). In another study by Belz and Geary (1984) it was concluded that both genders scored significantly lower on the quantitative section of the SAT. Tors (1995) explains that "a lack of educational attainment can result in diminished critical reasoning ability in ascertaining cause and effect relationships, analyzing any media information and objectively assessing various choices at the personal, community, and national levels" (p. 9).

In terms of educational upgrading beyond the high school level of children of divorce, Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989), who studied sixty middle-class families where one or both parents held college degrees, found two-thirds of the fathers offered no financial relief for college. In addition, few divorce settlements contained any arrangements for college. Moreover, Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989) found that sixty percent of these children were on a downward educational course compared to their fathers and forty-five percent were on a similar downward course compared with their mothers. Children who did not expect to go on to college because of the loss of economic resources due to divorce, were less motivated to do well academically (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994).

The years prior to divorce were studied and interpreted by Hartill (2001). It was established that students were affected more by the years prior to divorce, which invoke negative changes in academic progress. Many of the problems observed among children with divorced parents begin before the parental separation. Divorce can be viewed less as a specific event, rather than as process that changes over numerous years (Hartill, 2001).

Data from The National Survey of Families and Households was examined by Hanson (1999). The results indicated that the parental conflict experienced in 1988 had negative effects on children's school performance in 1999 for boys, however, parental conflict was not significantly related to the school grades of girls. Parental conflict was found to be associated with boys' self-esteem, yet not on girls' self-esteem. Furthermore, divorce had a negative effect on girls' self-esteem when the conflict was low, and a positive effect on self-esteem when conflict was high. Morrison and Cherlin (1995) discussed how the effects of divorce on children may not only reflect the stress of the breakup and subsequent fallout, but also dysfunctional family dynamics, parental conflict, or problems that occur prior to the breakup. The basic theory of Morrison and Cherlin (1995) "is that divorce should be viewed as a process characterized by a sequence of potentially stressful experiences that begin before physical separation and continue after it" (p. 813).

According to Berg and Kelly (1979) family interactions prior to divorce were of major importance to self-concept. Similarly, Parish and Nunn (1981) concluded that the unstable home contributed to lower self-concepts because the needs of the children were not met. These researchers found significant relationships between children's self-concepts and evaluations of their parents when those children came from divorced and/or unhappy homes. Nisivoccia (1997) explained that divorce results in young children

feeling insecure, inadequate, and helpless, possibly suggesting that they did something wrong, thus sharing in the responsibility of the divorce. This helpless feeling a child of divorced or separated parents experience may result in a loss of self-esteem.

Many studies have suggested that boys of divorced families display lower academic achievement than girls because of the many behavioral problems they exhibit. Marital conflict has been shown to have a larger effect on boys than girls due to their intense sensitivity to parental conflict (Nisivoccia, 1997). Kelly and Wallerstein (1976) believe that boys are developmentally more prone and susceptible to the stress factors of divorce. Kalter and Rembar (1981) discussed the conclusions of their study, finding that divorce occurring at two-and-a-half years or younger, was associated with separation-related difficulties during age seven through twelve-and-a-half for both boys and girls. Divorce occurring at age three through five-and-a-half showed the greatest effects in ages twelve through seventeen-and-a-half, with prominent evidence in gender differences. Parental divorce during this oedipal phase "seems to be linked to a relative inhibition of aggression in adolescent boys and more direct problematic aggression combined with academic problems for adolescent girls" (p. 99).

Zakariya (1982) reported results of a two-year study, cosponsored by The National Association of Elementary School Principals and The Institute for Development of Educational Activities. The purpose of this study was to compare the school performance of children from one-and-two parent homes. Wayne A. Barton (1982) of The Division of Education Policy Studies was contracted to perform additional analysis of the data from the first year of the study. His main focus was to identify any possible correlations between family income, number of parents in the home, and gender, on student achievement. Barton's analysis showed that girls from higher income, two-parent homes

ranked the highest for student achievement. This group was followed by girls from higher income, one-parent homes, then boys from higher income, two-parent homes. This ranking of groups shows that the family's income and gender had a greater effect on student achievement than did the number of parents in the household. Higher family income was present in the three highest groups and four out of the top five. Girls accounted for the top two groups and three of the highest four. However, when other variables were constant, children from two-parent homes achieved at higher levels than did children from one-parent homes. Barton (1982) explained that the positive relationship between number of parents and total family income "indicates that many factors negatively influencing achievement may be more readily found in the one-parent home. It does not necessarily say that single-parentness is the problem" (p. 36).

In a previously discussed study conducted by Hett (1980) parents were interviewed on the adverse effects of family separation and children's gender. Parents felt the most adverse effect was the lack of a male role model in the home and financial hardship. "Mothers of both boys and girls identified the lack of a male model and influence as a major disadvantage for their children. Several parents stated that their sons were less mature than other boys of their age and attributed this to the absence of a male after whom their sons could model themselves" (Hett, 1980, p. 9). Boys have been shown to display a more acting out-type behavior than girls (Dawson, 1981). Furthermore, boys living with their mothers have been characterized as being less aggressive, more dependent, less masculine, and more feminine in self-concepts and sex role preferences than boys from intact families (Hetherington, Cox, and Cox, 1978). Additionally, these researchers found that father availability played a critical role, especially for boys, as they grow older in correlation with IQ scores.

Morrison and Cherlin (1995) concluded from their study that there were no significant effects of marital disruption on girls' behavior problems or reading achievement, although girls did score somewhat lower on the reading recognition tests. The lack of behavior problems for girls could be attributed to the possibility that girls can be more resilient when confronted by stressful situations such as marital disruption. Another possible explanation is that girls may manifest distress by becoming more anxious, depressed, or exhibiting an overcompensation of good behavior. These manifestations are more difficult to observe (Morrison and Cherlin, 1995).

Resiliency is discussed by Ackerman (1997). She explained that resilient traits help children avoid, minimize, or overcome risk factors. Five major categories of traits within children and adults that aid them in becoming resilient are "social competencies or the exhibition of pro-social behaviors, well developed problem-solving skills, autonomy, religious/spiritual commitment, and a sense of purpose" (p. 15). Teachers of elementary school reported that resilient high-risk children had better reasoning and reading skills than the high-risk children who developed problems. This was especially true for girls who were also more assertive, independent, and achievement-oriented by the time they had graduated high school (Ackerman, 1997).

Allison and Furstenberg (1989) concluded from their study that the younger the child's age at the time of separation, the more vulnerable he or she becomes. These researchers suggested that because young children are more dependent on their parents, less protected by teachers or peers, and because they are in a more formative stage of development, they are less resilient when faced with a traumatic event.

Kelly and Wallerstein (1979) conducted a five-year longitudinal study involving the emotional impact of divorce on children and adolescents. According to Kelly and

Wallerstein (1976) behaviors apparent in the young children of early latency were sadness, fear, anger, and feelings of loss. In children of later latency, Kelly and Wallerstein (1976) noted that behaviors displayed were anger, fears, identity crisis, loneliness, and loyalty conflicts. Teachers found comparable behaviors in the classroom for one-half of these students. When these two groups of children were compared, Kelly and Wallerstein (1976) explained that the older children tried to hide their feelings by showing composure and courage while the younger children were characterized by being disorganized and paralyzed by grief. This pair also found that one year after the parental separation, the initial pain experienced was replaced by a sad acceptance of the situation. Overall, fifty percent of the children had improved or maintained their psychological functioning and twenty-three percent were functioning at lower levels. The one-year follow-up for nine and ten year olds showed that fifty percent of the children were making positive adjustments, while fifty percent were continuing to have difficulties. In their behavior study of children of divorce, Kelly and Wallerstein (1979) found that the most common feelings were loneliness, fear, anxiety, anger, stress, fears of abandonment, and guilt. The results of their study indicated that the way children reacted depended on the child's developmental stage, the amount of conflict within the family and it's members, and finally, the child's personality. There were no simple guidelines for identifying the students' reactions to the divorce in the classroom. Kelly and Wallerstein (1979) stated "There is no simple response to divorce that can be observed in the classroom and, thus, no simple guidelines for recognizing divorce-related behavior and emotional change" (p. 52). They continue to point out that because divorce was a major crisis in the child's life, behaviors including daydreaming, lack of concentration, and intense sadness led to a significant reduction in academic achievement. Wallerstein,

Corbin, and Lewis (1988) found that ten years after divorce many young children had very little memory of either the past parental conflict or their past fears and suffering. Furthermore, Wallerstein et al. (1988) discovered that adolescents who hold on to their memories of the conflicts and stress linked with the divorce, may be more consciously troubled.

According to Kelly and Wallerstein (1979) there was a definite, temporary interruption in the learning process which may lead to significant academic problems if the child was unable to regain his or her attention to learning within a reasonable amount of time. The stress of divorce lended itself to compromise a child's receptivity to learning, his or her willingness to use new materials, and overall attitude toward school and learning. Children may be most vulnerable in the earliest phases of mastering reading due to the family disruption and the disorganization of their lives. In order to maintain a positive attitude toward learning, older children also need a sense of achievement. Due to these risk factors, Kelly and Wallerstein (1979) indicated that it is critical for teachers and principals to be sensitive to the situations, even if the lack of ability to participate in the learning process is temporary. "Such awareness, and the willingness to provide a supportive setting for the distracted youngsters of divorce, will combine to make the school more responsive to the changes wrought by a decade of divorce. In so doing, schools will continue to meet their primary responsibility-helping all children learn at the level of their highest potential" (p. 58). Hett (1980) explained that it is the teachers who have the most contact with the children whose lives are affected by parental separation and divorce. That puts these teachers in the position to provide the greatest assistance to their students and to become aware of the problems and symptoms associated with family separation.

Kelly and Wallerstein (1979) investigated the school's role as a support system for children of divorce. "The school represents the most continuous institution in the lives of many children each year whose parents divorce" (p. 56). The child's ability to use the school as a support system when in crisis increased with the child's age. Kelly and Wallerstein (1979) found three ways that the school was useful. First, it supplied children with structure at a time when the family structure was disintegrating. Regardless of their academic and social levels in the classroom, schools supported these children by requiring them to execute certain tasks in and out of school, going to school daily, and having routine social interactions. Second, the school supported children who enjoyed going to school and whose academic achievements carried and fostered them. Such children displayed the characteristics of working hard and receiving good grades. These children were the minority. The school support system was positive for only those children who had above average intelligence, who were already doing well academically, and who were psychologically more healthy than the other children studied. These children did not depend on the teacher for support, although there was evidence of a positive, helpful relationship. The third way the child benefited from the school support system included a close relationship and reliance on a friendly teacher. Young children found comfort by physical nurturance and assurance that they and their work were accepted. The comfort provided by the teacher temporarily lowered anxiety and provided a small amount of security. Unfortunately, in some cases, this nurturance was not sufficient to alleviate insecurity and anxiety. For this reason, it is important for the school and teachers who observe this continuing need for reassurance and comfort in children to discuss their vulnerability with the parents before the children's learning

process is further compromised. It was concluded by Kelly and Wallerstein (1979) that teachers should be aware and sensitive to these children's stresses and be willing to make the most of their efforts to cope. It was also explained that curriculum and attitudes need to be addressed by utilizing materials that are devoted to acknowledging the many different aspects of family life. These materials will make children feel more secure with their own family structure.

Whitfield and Freeland (1981) suggested that schools and teachers incorporate the use of bibliotherapy for children of divorce, specifically the use of units relating to the family which could be integrated with the social studies curriculum. Monteith (1981) defines bibliotherapy as the use of books for coping with personal problems. This method has been supported for many years. The most effective use of bibliotherapy to change attitudes includes reading stories followed by discussion. Timing is also a very important element. The materials should be readily available and the choice of books should be left to the child. Bibliotherapy can aid children because there are a multitude of books that are enjoyable to read, which deal with coping with life's difficulties. This technique allows the child from divorce an opportunity to identify with others in a confidential environment and to practice solutions, promote feelings of belonging, provide information about the stages of grief, experience the problems of others, vicariously, and provide insight into the experience of loss. The reading teacher can be beneficial to the child of divorce by having ready both knowledge and a collection of books on the subject of divorce, which may provide comfort (Monteith, 1981).

Brown (1980) reflected on the differences in school achievement, tardiness, absenteeism, truancy, discipline problems, suspensions, expulsions, and dropouts between children living with two parents and those living with one parent, and those

living with a relative or in a foster home. The subjects included 5,286 elementary school students and 3, 270 high school students, for a total of 8,556 students. Brown's (1980) study indicated that a substantial proportion of high achievers come from the two-parent homes. In the elementary school, eighty-four percent were high achievers from two-parent homes, while sixteen percent were from one-parent homes. Seventy-eight percent were average achievers from two-parent homes, while only twenty-two percent were from one-parent homes. Finally, sixty-five percent were low achievers from two-parent homes and only thirty-five percent were from one-parent homes. Brown (1980) stated that, "While low numbers in the high-achievement group are distressing, the high numbers in the low-achievement groups are alarming. Differences among high school students are less dramatic in both the high-and low-achievement areas, but there is still a disportionately high number of secondary school students from one-parent and other situations in the low-achievement group" (p. 539). Further results of this study showed a substantially higher level of occurrence of tardiness, discipline problems, suspensions, student mobility, truancy, expulsions, dropouts, and participation in Title I programs in children from one-parent homes. As a result of this study, Brown (1980) detected some obvious implications. These included that the nation's schools must face the problems of one-parent children in new and better ways. Also, student records needed to be updated and received in order for guidance counselors and teachers to become more responsive and sensitive to the needs of these children. Schools must revise their calendars in order for working, single parents to have regular access to school personnel and activities. Curriculum and school services must be revised to better accommodate the needs of the growing numbers of children from one-parent families. Lastly, Brown (1980) explained

the importance of adult education programs sponsored by the school systems in an effort to provide effective parenting.

Pedro and Sutton (1999) devised The Children of Divorce Intervention Program (CODIP). This preventive intervention consisted of two central components: group support and instruction in social competence. The objectives of the program were to create a supportive group environment in which children could comfortably share experiences, build common bonds, clarify misconceptions, and teach children skills that promote their ability to cope with the stressful changes of divorce. Pedro and Sutton (1999) began their program in 1997, working with five-and six-year old children. An evaluation was conducted two years later. It was found that the teachers of these children reported gains in the participants' school-related competencies and their ability to ask for help when needed. School-related behavior problems decreased. Subjects who chose not to participate, displayed lower adjustment scores and higher ratings of acting-out and learning problems.

Nisivoccia (1997) pointed out that parental separation and divorce can have a critical negative effect on student's academic performance and hinder their ability to reach their full potential for school success.

Fuller (1989) reported that there are various approaches which can be applied by parents and educators, to be supportive of children of divorce. These included providing in-service training for educators with accurate information on single-parent homes so that their perceptions are appropriate. Another suggestion was to avoid stereotyping children of divorce since these negative expectations invoke problems and are based on inaccurate stereotypes. The final suggestion was to provide materials that portray a variety of family styles. In order to lessen the negative impact of divorce on the child, Hammond

(1979) determined that teachers should be sensitive and positive, providing an accepting classroom atmosphere by encouraging all children to become more sensitive and accepting of separated families. Preventive intervention should be recommended and provided for children displaying signs of adjustment problems, whether academic or behavioral, following marital disruption. Such early efforts may bypass a possible downward spiral of academic and behavioral hardships so commonly associated with children of divorce (Kinard and Reinherz, 1986).

Levine (1982) conducted a study that found that teachers had lower psychosocial and academic expectations for children from one-parent homes. Parker (1980) discussed this problem and explained that often teachers' negative expectations are self-fulfilling. It was suggested that teachers should be aware of their own bias regarding divorce, so they might expel any negative expectations toward children from divorced homes. Similarly, Thompson and Smidchens (1979) noted that since children's reading comprehension achievement may be affected by teacher expectations they must be constantly aware of their own personal biases, due to being members of other ethnic, religious, and social groups. These biases "may be directed toward the lifestyles of the parents of children for whom they are charged with the responsibility for the development of basic academic skills" (p. 12). Teachers must remember that each child is an individual and while some children may display negative behavior, others will react to divorce in an acceptable manner (Strom, 1983). Barton's (1982) analysis of data from the study cosponsored by The National Association of Elementary Principals and The Institute for Development of Educational Activities discovered that, as a group, children from single-parent families may be at risk academically, but that does not mean that educators should expect these children to have trouble at school. Furthermore, he concluded that children from one and

two parent families spent a comparable amount of time doing homework and reading for pleasure. Monteith (1981) pointed out that teachers need to be cautious and recognize that children from divorce often share their time between the custodial and noncustodial parents. This situation puts the child at risk for successfully completing homework assignments, remembering schoolbooks and other school-related materials, and notes sent home to the parents may end up with the wrong parent. Although these matters need to be taken into consideration, teachers should not pity children from divorced homes, nor should divorce be an excuse for overlooking behavior problems or accepting lower standards in academic matters (Butler, 1988).

Ball, Newman, and Scheuren (1984) conducted a study in which the primary purpose was to investigate the differences in teachers' expectations in general for children of mother-headed homes and children of two-parent homes. A secondary purpose was to analyze differences in teachers' expectations in general for boys and girls living with their divorced mothers. Questionnaires from 987 teachers, grades K-12 were analyzed. The questionnaires contained fourteen questions concerning expectations about a hypothetical student. Thirteen of the questions related to expected academic, behavioral, social, and psychological characteristics of the student plus teachers' expectations for remedial instruction. Four versions of the questionnaire were randomly distributed to teachers of each grade. Each version differed from the others only to the extent that the introductory statement was modified to change the sex of the hypothetical child and the marital status of the mother. After reading their questionnaires, the teachers rated their student on eleven characteristics, which included: 1 Works independently, 2 Comes to class prepared, 3 Academic achievement, 4 Classroom behavior, 5 Socioeconomic level, 6 Mother's participation in school activities, 7 Father's participation in school

activities, 8 Sexual identity adjustment, 9 Copes with stress in school, 10 Social adjustment, and 11 Emotional adjustment. These characteristics were rated using the following scale: 1 – Far below average or very poor adjustment, 2 - Below average or poor adjustment, 3 - Average or average adjustment, 4 – Above average or good adjustment, or 5 – Far above average or very good adjustment. Questions twelve and thirteen required the teacher to answer yes or no to the questions: "12 Would you anticipate the need for remedial instruction such as Title I, Special Education, etc? 13 Would you anticipate the need for additional human or pupil services such as psychologist, social worker, or counselor?" (p. 348). The fourteenth question asked "to select one of the following statements which most accurately defines how they would expect to feel about the described student: (a) If I had a choice I would select this type of student to teach for another year because I would enjoy teaching him. (b) I would direct much of my attention to this type of student because I would be concerned about him. (c) I would probably not mind having this type of student in my class. (d) I would expect this type of student to be a problem in my class at the end of the year." (p. 348-349). Ball et al. concluded that on no variable was there a significant difference in teachers' generalized expectations of boys versus girls from two-parent homes, according to the teachers' mean responses. The mean expectancies for boys versus girls living with their divorced mothers suggested that teachers had considerably more negative expectations of boys living with their divorced mothers than of girls living with their divorced mothers in regard to working independently, class preparation, academic achievement, classroom behavior, sexual and emotional adjustments, and coping with stress. Teachers' responses on all variables were more negative for boys from divorced homes than for boys or girls from traditional families and girls from divorced homes. Girls from divorced homes

were more negatively rated than boys and girls from traditional families on all variables except working independently, academic achievement, and the need for remedial instruction, which showed no significant difference. The summary of the results indicated that teachers'generalized expectations for children living with their divorced mothers were more negative than teachers' generalized expectations of children living with both parents. "If teachers' generalized expectancies lead to self-fulfilling prophesy as suggested in the literature, the outcome would be expected to be the same. Children of single-parent homes would be expected to tend to perform less well and have more school problems than their contemporaries from traditional families" (p. 353)

Guttman, Geva, and Gefen (1988) investigated the feelings, opinions, and knowledge teachers possess about children of divorce. The subjects consisted of 117 teachers. Teachers received divorce education, which varied from short presentations to semester- or quarter-length courses. The teachers were administered 37 questions, including three categories. These categories included knowledge about divorce in the United States and its effects on children, opinions on divorce, and the school's role in working with children of divorce. The results suggested that teachers of grades preschool through three were more aware of the possibility of problems. The teachers of older children did not share these opinions. A possible explanation for this may be that teachers of younger children interact more frequently with their students. Another justification may be that younger children show their suffering more openly, whereas older children tend to discuss their problems with peers who are in the same situation. Their most dramatic conclusion was that for the non- preschool through grade three teachers, divorce education had a profound positive impact on teachers' conceptions of children of divorce and teachers' attitudes about their responsibilities to these children.

Guttman et al. concluded that the repercussions of teachers' expectations are long lasting. Since performance is influenced by teachers' expectations, teachers should not assume all children of divorce will have problems with academics and social adjustment. Divorce does not necessarily cause academic and behavioral problems. Through divorce education, teachers might gain an awareness that there may be problems, but that they should not expect problems.

The main purpose of another study led by Guttman, Geva, and Gefen (1988) was to investigate how teachers' and students' judgements of a child's academic, social, and emotional functioning were influenced by the knowledge that his or her parents are divorced. The subjects consisted of 104 teachers and 120 seventh and eighth grade students. The stimulus material included a written introduction in which two main independent variables were manipulated in a film featuring the target child. The written introduction indicated that the purpose of the study was to see what kind and how much information could be relayed through a film. The subjects were told they were about to see a film of a nine-year-old boy or girl in fourth grade. This statement introduced the sex-of-the-target-child manipulation. The family structure was manipulated by indicating that either the boy or girl lived with his or her parents or that the boy or girl lived with the mother. The film was eight minutes long and presented the child taking part in various activities with equal time spans of age-appropriate academic, social, and self-indulging behaviors, as well as behaviors that were equally appropriate for either gender of the child. One of the measurements included an assessment rating scale of the subjects' judgements involving twenty-three characteristics. Seven characteristics were school related, seven were socially related, and nine were related to the child's emotional functioning. The results showed that the child was less favorably judged if thought to be

from a divorced home in all three areas, by both teachers and students. Additionally, parental divorce was shown to affect girls more adversely than boys on the academic section, whereas boys were seen as more negatively affected emotionally. This result is inconsistent with Ball's et al. (1984) finding that boys suffer more than girls from the divorced parents stereotype.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of the present study was to examine teachers' expectations on reading achievement for children from divorced families. Although many studies have been completed on teachers' expectations regarding the effects of divorce on general academic achievement, the current investigation extended the research base by focusing on the expectations that teachers held specific to reading achievement for children affected by marital disruption.

Method

Participants – The subjects were sixty educators from a middle-class, suburban school district in central New Jersey. The job descriptions of these participants included regular education teachers, special education teachers, principals, nurses, and art, gym, music, and library teachers from three elementary schools.

Materials - The materials needed to conduct this study included a two-paged survey created by the researcher. The first part of this survey asked the participants for their age, sex, subjects or grades currently being taught, years of teaching experience, degree(s) held, and marital status. The second section of the survey investigated how teachers' expectations of a child's reading achievement were influenced by the knowledge that his or her parents are divorced. The stimulus material included a written introduction in

which two main independent variables were manipulated. This written introduction indicated that the purpose of the survey was to rate teachers' expectations on children's reading achievement and motivation. This statement explained that the hypothetical child is an eight-year-old living in a middle-class, suburban town with an eleven-year-old sister and a six-year-old brother. The written introduction also introduced the sex of the hypothetical child. The family structure is manipulated by indicating that either the boy or girl lives with his or her parents or that the boy or girl lives with the mother. Each of the four versions of the survey differs from the others only to the extent that the introductory statement was modified to change the sex of the hypothetical child and the marital status of the mother. The teachers then numerically rated their child on seven characteristics, which include: 1 Performance in reading/language arts achievement on end-of-the-year standardized tests, 2 Performance in reading/language arts achievement throughout the year, 3 Amount of time reading for pleasure, 4 Amount of time child is read to by either his or her mother or father, 5 Level of motivation on reading/language arts activities, 6 Works independently, 7 Classroom behavior. These characteristics were rated using the following scale: 1 – Far Below Average, 2 – Below Average, 3 – Average, 4 – Above Average, 5 – Far Above Average.

Procedure - Prior to the study, building principals were required to give approval for surveys to be administered at faculty meetings. The four versions of the survey were then randomly distributed among the elementary school staff. Surveys took ten minutes to complete. Completed surveys were collected immediately.

Data Analysis - Data was analyzed in a quantitative manner. The numerical responses to the seven questions were totaled and then averaged. Total scores were calculated by the individual seven questions within the four versions of the survey.

Results - The participants who completed this survey were consistent with their perceptions on each of the seven questions when asked to rate the performance in reading/language arts achievement on the end-of-the-year standardized tests. Boys from divorced families totaled the lowest with a total score of 44, followed by boys from intact families with a total score of 55. Girls from divorced families totaled 46 and girls from intact families scored the highest with 57. Performance in reading/language arts achievement throughout the year was scored lowest with boys from divorced families with a total of 47, followed by boys from intact families with a score of 53. Girls from divorced families totaled 49, while girls from intact families scored 56. When questioned on the amount of time reading for pleasure, teacher expectations were again lowest for boys from divorced families with a score of 37. Boys from intact families scored 42. Girls from divorced families totaled 54 and finally, girls from intact families totaled 58. Boys from divorced families scored a 31 in relation to the amount of time the child is read to by either his or her mother or father, followed by boys from intact families with a total score of 43. Girls from divorced families totaled 43. The highest score was a 52 representing girls from intact families. Level of motivation on reading/language arts activities was perceived lowest for boys from divorced families with a total of 38, followed by boys from intact families, scoring 48. The next level was comprised of girls from divorced families with a score of 53 and the highest score of 56 was evident with girls from intact families. The last two questions did not directly deal with reading/language arts, rather with work and behavior habits. Again, the pattern remains constant with boys from divorced families totaling 44 in the area of working independently. Boys from intact families scored 53. Girls from divorced families totaled 58 and lastly, girls from intact families scored 59. The last question dealt with classroom

behavior. Boys from divorced families totaled 39, followed by boys from intact families, scoring 47. Next were girls from divorced families totaling 59 and lastly were girls from intact families with a total score of 63. The numerical totals of the teacher ratings for each of the seven questions are shown in Table I.

Table I

Total Scores of Teacher Ratings

Questions	Boys/Divorced	Boys/Intact	Girls/Divorced	Girls/Intact
1. Performance in reading/ language arts achievement on the end-of-the-year standardized tests	44	55	46	57
2. Performance in reading/ language arts achievement throughout the year	47	53	49	56
3. Amount of time reading for pleasure	37	42	54	58
4. Amount of time child is read to by either his or her mother or father	31	43	43	52
5. Level of motivation on reading/ language arts activities	38	48	53	56
6. Works independently	44	53	58	59
7. Classroom behavior	39	47	59	63

As seen in Table II, the average of the teacher responses of children's reading achievement indicates that overall expectations for boys affected by marital disruption is the lowest with an average of 40. This is followed by boys from intact families with an average of 49. The third level is comprised of girls from divorced families with an average of 52. The highest average of 57 is observed with girls from intact homes.

Table II

Averages of Teacher Ratings

Boys/Divorced Families	Boys/Intact Families	Girls/Divorced Families	Girls/Intact Families
40	49	52	57

Discussion – The findings from this study support the assumption that teachers hold lower expectations regarding reading achievement for children from divorced families. Furthermore, boys from intact and divorced families were viewed with lower expectations than were girls, regardless of the girl's family situation.

The participants who completed this survey were consistent with their perceptions on each of the seven questions when asked to rate the performance in reading/language arts achievement on the end-of-the-year standardized tests. .

Overall, teachers expected that girls from divorced families achieved higher than boys from divorced families on all seven questions and girls from intact families consistently achieved higher than boys from intact families. Boys from divorced families achieved lower than boys from intact families on the seven questions and girls from divorced families consistently achieved lower than girls from intact families.

These findings are consistent with Nisivoccia's (1997) study which suggested that boys from divorced families displayed lower academic achievement than girls because of the many behavioral problems they exhibit and their intense sensitivity to parental conflict. Similarly, Morrison and Cherlin (1995) concluded that the lack of behavioral problems for girls could be attributed to the possibility that girls can be more resilient when confronted with stressful situations such as marital disruption.

Teachers' negative expectations for children from one-parent homes may be self-fulfilling (Parker, 1980). It was suggested that teachers should be aware of their own bias regarding divorce, so they might dismiss any negative expectations towards children from divorced families. Barton's (1982) analysis of data suggested that, as a group, children from divorced homes may be at risk academically, but that does not mean that teachers should expect these children to suffer at school.

Conclusions from a study conducted by Ball, Newman, and Scheuren (1984) were also consistent with the results from the present study. The researchers suggested that teachers had more negative expectations of boys living with their divorced mothers than of girls living with their divorced mothers in regard to working independently, class preparation, academic achievement, classroom behavior, sexual and emotional adjustments, and coping with stress. Teachers' responses were more negative for boys from divorced families than for boys or girls from traditional families and girls from divorced homes.

Guttman, Geva, and Gefen's (1988) findings were inconsistent with the findings of Ball, Newman, and Scheuren (1984) and the present study. These researchers concluded that a child was less favorably judged if thought to be from a divorced family, but

parental divorce was shown to affect girls more negatively than boys in academic achievement, whereas boys were viewed more adversely than girls emotionally.

This present study could be replicated and expanded to a larger sample of teachers from an older population of students in order to extend what we already know about the literature.

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Appendix: Four Versions of the Survey

1) Grade(s) or subject(s) currently teaching_____

2) Sex Female____ Male____

3) Age____

4) Years of teaching experience_____

5) Degree(s) earned_____

6) Marital status Never Married___ Single___ Divorced/ Separated___

Widowed___ Married___

The purpose of this survey is to rate *teachers' expectations* on children's reading achievement and motivation. The hypothetical child you will rate is an eight-year-old boy who lives in a middle-class, suburban town with his parents, his eleven-year-old sister, and a six-year-old brother. Please numerically rate the following situations as follows:

1 – Far Below Average 2 – Below Average 3 – Average 4 – Above Average

5 – Far Above Average

1) Performance in reading/language arts achievement on end-of -the-year standardized tests_____

2) Performance in reading/language arts achievement throughout the year_____

3) Amount of time reading for pleasure_____

4) Amount of time child is read to by either his mother or father_____

5) Level of motivation on reading/language arts activities_____

6) Works independently_____

7) Classroom behavior_____

Please answer Yes or No

8) Would you anticipate the need for remedial instruction in reading for this student?_____

9) Would you anticipate the need for student services such as psychologist, counselor, or social worker for this student?_____

10) If given the choice, I would like to have this student in my class for another year because I enjoyed teaching him._____

11) I would be concerned about this student, therefore I would direct much of my attention to him._____

1) Grade(s) or subject(s) currently teaching_____

2) Sex Female____ Male____

3) Age____

4) Years of teaching experience_____

5) Degree(s) earned_____

6) Marital status Never Married___ Single___ Divorced/ Separated___

Widowed___ Married___

The purpose of this survey is to rate *teachers' expectations* on children's reading achievement and motivation. The hypothetical child you will rate is an eight-year-old boy who lives in a middle-class, suburban town since his parents'divorce two years ago. He lives with his mother, eleven-year-old sister, and a six-year-old brother. Please numerically rate the following situations as follows:

1 – Far Below Average 2 – Below Average 3 – Average 4 – Above Average

5 – Far Above Average

1) Performance in reading/language arts achievement on end-of -the-year standardized tests_____

2) Performance in reading/language arts achievement throughout the year_____

3) Amount of time reading for pleasure_____

4) Amount of time child is read to by either his mother or father_____

5) Level of motivation on reading/language arts activities_____

6) Works independently_____

7) Classroom behavior_____

Please answer Yes or No

8) Would you anticipate the need for remedial instruction in reading for this student?_____

9) Would you anticipate the need for student services such as psychologist, counselor, or social worker for this student?_____

10) If given the choice, I would like to have this student in my class for another year because I enjoyed teaching him._____

11) I would be concerned about this student, therefore I would direct much of my attention to him._____

1) Grade(s) or subject(s) currently teaching_____

2) Sex Female____ Male____

3) Age____

4) Years of teaching experience_____

5) Degree(s) earned_____

6) Marital status Never Married___ Single___ Divorced/ Separated___

Widowed___ Married___

The purpose of this survey is to rate *teachers' expectations* on children's reading achievement and motivation. The hypothetical child you will rate is an eight-year-old girl who lives in a middle-class, suburban town since her parents'divorce two years ago. She lives with her mother, eleven-year-old sister, and a six-year-old brother. Please numerically rate the following situations as follows:

1 – Far Below Average 2 – Below Average 3 – Average 4 – Above Average

5 – Far Above Average

1) Performance in reading/language arts achievement on end-of -the-year standardized tests_____

2) Performance in reading/language arts achievement throughout the year_____

3) Amount of time reading for pleasure_____

4) Amount of time child is read to by either her mother or father_____

5) Level of motivation on reading/language arts activities_____

6) Works independently_____

7) Classroom behavior_____

Please answer Yes or No

8) Would you anticipate the need for remedial instruction in reading for this student?_____

9) Would you anticipate the need for student services such as psychologist, counselor, or social worker for this student?_____

10) If given the choice, I would like to have this student in my class for another year because I enjoyed teaching her._____

11) I would be concerned about this student, therefore I would direct much of my attention to her._____

1) Grade(s) or subject(s) currently teaching_____

2) Sex Female____ Male____

3) Age____

4) Years of teaching experience_____

5) Degree(s) earned_____

6) Marital status Never Married___ Single___ Divorced/ Separated___

Widowed___ Married___

The purpose of this survey is to rate *teachers' expectations* on children's reading achievement and motivation. The hypothetical child you will rate is an eight-year-old girl who lives in a middle-class, suburban town with her parents, her eleven-year-old sister, and a six-year-old brother. Please numerically rate the following situations as follows:

1 – Far Below Average 2 – Below Average 3 – Average 4 – Above Average

5 – Far Above Average

1) Performance in reading/language arts achievement on end-of -the-year standardized tests_____

2) Performance in reading/language arts achievement throughout the year_____

3) Amount of time reading for pleasure_____

4) Amount of time child is read to by either her mother or father_____

5) Level of motivation on reading/language arts activities_____

6) Works independently_____

7) Classroom behavior_____

Please answer Yes or No

8) Would you anticipate the need for remedial instruction in reading for this student?_____

9) Would you anticipate the need for student services such as psychologist, counselor, or social worker for this student?_____

10) If given the choice, I would like to have this student in my class for another year because I enjoyed teaching her._____

11) I would be concerned about this student, therefore I would direct much of my attention to her._____